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U.S. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS LEARN OF NAVAJO "REVOLUTION".

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NAVAJO CULTURE AND LANGUAGE ARE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF OTHER AMERICANS, AND HELP TO ACCOUNT FOR GENERALLY LOW SUCCESS OF NAVAJO CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM. BY NOVEMBER 1966, WHEN TITLE I OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT HAD BECOME AVAILABLE TO FEDERAL SCHOOLS, THE NAVAJO TRIBAL COUNCIL'S EDUCATION COMMITTEE HAD DECIDED THAT WHAT THE STUDENTS NEEDED MOST WAS A BETTER COMMAND OF ENGLISH AND AN IMPROVED SELF IMAGE. AFTER DETERMINING THAT A LINGUISTIC APPROACH GREATLY FACILITATED ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) LEARNING, CONSULTANTS WERE HIRED TO HELP IN PLANNING AND EVALUATING ESL PROGRAMS FOR THE TRIBE. TWO RESERVATION ESL TRAINING CENTERS, EXPANDED IN-SERVICE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES, NDEA WORKSHOPS, AND CONSULTANTS WERE ALL UTILIZED TO AID IN TEACHER TRAINING AND GROWTH. BUS TRIPS OFF THE RESERVATION CONTRIBUTED TO STUDENT LANGUAGE ENRICHMENT. A CONTRACT HAS BEEN MADE WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO TO DEVELOP NAVAJO SOCIAL STUDIES UNITS UTILIZING A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH AIMED AT DEVELOPING PROPER APPRECIATION BY NAVAJOS OF THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE. OTHER PROGRAMS HAVE SOUGHT TO INVOLVE NAVAJO PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING, AND THERE IS A MOVEMENT TOWARD FORMATION OF RESERVATION SCHOOL BOARDS COMPOSED OF INDIAN RESIDENTS. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN, "NAVAJO TIMES," WINDOW ROCK, ARIZONA, MARCH 7, 1968. (BR)

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U.S. School Administrators Learn of Navajo "Revolution"

(Editor's Note: Following is the text of a speech made on February 19 by Dr. William J. Benham Jr., at the 100th annual conference of the American Association of School Administrators. The conference was held at Atlantic City, N.J. Dr. Benham is Assistant Area Director (Education) of the Navajo Area of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. An 18-year employee of the BIA, he is part-Creek Indian. His great-great grandfather, William F. Robison, a full-blood Creek, served as superintendent of all Creek Nation schools in Oklahoma in the 1880s. His great-grandmother, Miss Lucy Robison, was a teacher in Creek schools).

Today, I want to report a revolution. This is not a revolution in the traditional sense, which has as its aim the overthrow of a government. Rather, it is the rebellion of an Indian tribe -- the Navajo, the Nation's largest tribe --against the educational problems it faces.

The generals of the revolutionary forces are tribal leaders. In their ranks are Navajo parents and students and the Federal agencies that serve them on the reservation, notably the bureau of Indian Affairs. A most important weapon being used in this fight at the present time is Title I of Public Law 89-10.

Let us examine for a few minutes the Indian people caught up in this movement; the land, the problems; the leaders; and how Title I of Public Law 89-10 has assisted.

The Navajo reservation is in the Four Corners Area of the United States with parts of it located in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Most of the reservation is in Arizona. It is an area of 16-million acres, or 25,000 square miles--about the size of the state of West Virginia. This beautiful, but barren land is made up of deep arroyos and high mesas. It is a land of vivid color contrasts, which find expression in the art objects of the Navajo people. Many Navajos still live in their traditional hogans, an octagonal dwelling made of logs and mud. The Navajos number about 110,000. Traditionally a

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semi-nomadic people, they value self-reliance and independence. The great courage and fortitude of the Navajo is evidenced by the manner the tribe withstood this winter, which has been extremely harsh.

The size of the tribe and the relative isolation of the reservation has enabled the Navajo to preserve, to a large extent, their tribal way of life. They have preserved their own language. This language is completely different from English and other Indo-European languages. As one author said, it is so different it forces the speaker into two different images of reality. Only a handful of non-Navajos have ever mastered the Navajo language.

Generally speaking, the Navajos have accepted the concept of representative democracy. They have a tribal chairman and a 74-member tribal council, both elected every four years, and they are presently working on a tribal constitution, patterned after the United States constitution. Reservation land is held in com-con by the Tribe, but, contrary to popular belief, individual Navajos receive no subsidy from either the Tribe or the Federal Government.

Let's examine some of the problems the Navajos--and most reservation Indians for that matter--face.

When compared with the general population, the Navajo American people who live on the reservation, face disadvantages ranging from health to housing, from lack of education to unemployment.

A high birth and mortality rate are part of the Navajo way of life. Both birth rate and infant death rate are higher than that for the general population.

At least half of all adult Navajos are unemployed. Some work on seasonal, part-time jobs--such as migrant form labor--but few work the year-round. This is a distressing figure in light of the national unemployment rate of four or five per cent. Most reservation families have an annual income of $1,500 to $1,800--just about half of the $3,000 used to designate the poverty line for the general population.

In addition to these handicaps, the reservation Indian stands apart from the general population in another important, vital way. It is this: The Indian's cultural background, like the language which reflects it, is quite different from that of other Americans.

These differences are reflected through lack of success, generally speaking, in the classroom. Too often the Indian student -- confronted with a completely new world in the classroom -- drops out of school. Too often, the Indian student succumbs to a feeling of helplessness and inadequacy. Too often, he is felled by a new, complex language -- English -- which to him is a "foreign" language. Too often, he has no knowledge of the teaching materials of the classroom, which reflect activities completely removed from his range of experiences. He wonders, and questions, the significance of being a Navajo Indian in a nation that is predominantly non-Indian.

The Education Committee of the Navajo Tribal Council, over the years, has tried to stay in touch with the needs of Navajo youth. This is a committee appointed by the tribal council, and its five members are all councilmen.

The Education Committee realizes that the median age of the reservation population is about 17 years -- this is to say about one-half of the population is 17 years of age and under.

The tribal council has utilized programs, such as the Economic Opportunity Act, to create opportunities for the adult population by programs of training, employment, housing and adult education. Through tribal efforts, industrialization and urbanization are developing on the reservation.

In early 1966, the Education Committee began the revolution in Navajo education. After a considerable discussion of the direction the revolution should take -- there was unanimous agreement that the following would be the goals for Navajo education.

1. To attack the unique problems of Navajo students by the provision of appropriate programs suited to the needs of these

students, such as the ESL program.

2. To seek maximum, feasible involvement of parents and tribal leaders in the educative program.

3. To develop a public information program which reflects progress made on a continuing basis.

4. To endeavor to assist in any way possible so that full utilization can be made of resources, including the Economic Opportunity Act, Public Law 89-10, and other similar programs which can benefit the Navajo people.

Even with the intense commitment, it was evident that in an era of rising costs, characterized by a "shrinking dollar," the goals would not be accomplished for many, many years. The committee was aware of the fact that the needs of the students were immediate.

This was true because the main problem confronting the Education Committee and Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel for the accomplishment of the goals was lack of financial resources. Resources to give needed impetus to revolutionary efforts. This changed rapidly, because in November 1966, by special provision of Congress, the 55 Federal schools serving some 20,000 Navajo students became eligible for participation under Public Law 89-10, or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Public schools already were enjoying the fruits of this program.

Armed with this new resource, and with the Education Committee working closely with Bureau personnel, Title I projects were quickly formulated to meet the urgency of the situation.

Thus, with the direction determined by the Education Committee or the "generals," the revolution began to take form. Here is the sequence of events which followed.

It was determined that what the students needed most was better English-speaking capability and an improved self-image. Thus it was decided that the new resource -- Public Law 89-10 -- should be centered on these "key" needs, instead of dissipating this windfall on unrelated programs.

The time was ripe. Earlier in the year a committee had been formed -- composed of teachers, school principals and others trained in English as-a-second-language, or ESL. This committee was an outgrowth of an experiment begun at a boarding school at Shiprock, New Mexico in 1959. It was shown that the linguistic approach to teaching English to the nine out of ten students who came to school speaking only Navajo was clearly superior.

Thus, the first objective in providing an appropriate program was to institute the ESL approach in the 900 classrooms in Bureau schools on the reservation.

To do this, consultants of national reputation were hired to help in planning and evaluation. Existing inservice training was stepped up, new inservice training planned, and work on tests was begun by outside specialists to determine the progress and placement of students in terms of their English capabilities. Off-reservation language enrichment experiences were begun.

The employment of consultants of national stature was of much consequence. The appraisals given after field visits helped to enrich the activities being carried on and gave persons engaged in this formidable task assurance that the right path was being taken. It also provided an opportunity for professional growth by Navajo Area educators.

Before Public Law 89-10 had been made applicable to Federal schools, two schools had been designated ESL Training Centers. Based on a most favorable evaluation by the consultants of the week-long training sessions being conducted, the sessions were accelerated. This enabled the most skilled practitioners in ESL to orient other personnel, including some from public schools, to ESL theory, methods and practice.

Other inservice training opportunities were made possible. With Title I help, a contract was made to get ESL training films developed. This was done. The training films became a helpful addition to a two-week session held at the close of the school year in English as-a-second-language. More than 900 teachers

attended this session, which was under the direction of Dr. Robert Wilson of the University of California at Los Angeles. Helping Dr. Wilson were other members of the faculty of UCLA, and about 45 graduate assistants. The careful planning of this session by Dr. Wilson and staff members assured its success. This might well be one of the largest group training efforts in the country.

With this help, this year, it has been possible to implement an ESL program in every classroom in every Federal school on the Navajo reservation.

It must be noted that other help was received, also. Working with the Universities of Arizona and California, two NDEA workshops in ESL were planned. From them, 50 Navajo Area personnel received 6 to 8 weeks in-depth training in ESL.

Public Law 89-10, Title I, made another important contribution to language enrichment. Last year, all Navajo students in Federal schools were able to take bus trips to enlarge their limited experiences and give meaning and depth to language. For some of these students, it was their first time off the reservation -- their first opportunity to eat in a restaurant, ride in an elevator and stay in a motel.

Most of the trips were made to off-reservation locations such as Albuquerque and Phoenix. The trips were designed to let the students spend time in museums, factories, parks, zoos, tours of residential areas, and other activities which enlarged their experiences. According to teachers, this was, in effect, an upward bound program in itself. It gave new motivation to learning. This was made possible by Title I, Public Law 89-10.

Some strongly feel that this attention to English as-a-second-language and extension of experiences have had an effect on the self-image of the students. They feel that the confidence gained by the ESL approach has proven most beneficial. However, this is not the only effort being made in this regard.

With the help of Title I, Public Law 89-10, a contract was made with the University of New Mexico to develop Navajo

Social Studies units which could be used for a 4 to 6 weeks period each of the 12 years of the students' schooling. As conceived, it will be a multi-disciplinary approach which utilizes contributions from anthropology, sociology, psychology and other fields. The studies will be concerned with the history, legends, government, problems, and opportunities of the Navajo people. Most important, it will have as its central aim the development of a proper appreciation of the students' rich heritage -- heritage which will certainly lead to future accomplishments. Material on Navajo legends is being developed at the Rough Rock Demonstration School in Arizona which will be used in the Social Studies units. This school is jointly sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Other important Title I projects were carried out at individual locations. These included summer bus trips of extended periods for enrichment purposes, a multi-media project to accelerate learning, a project to use parents in dormitories, and provision for summer sessions for high school students.

Not only has teacher morale been improved but the activity made possible by Public Law 89-10 has enabled the revolution in Navajo Education to extend beyond the bounds of the classroom. Because of the impetus given by the generals to goal formulation and Title I projects, much more activity was stimulated.

To illustrate, not only did "Tribal Leaders" Day and "Parents' Day" become regular events in all Navajo area schools, but something else important happened. A movement started for the formation of school boards made up of Indian residents of the reservation. This has gained momentum.